

For a safer Memorial Day holiday weekend, DNREC Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police advise: Don't drink and boat on Delaware waterways

DOVER – For the upcoming Memorial Day holiday weekend, DNREC Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police remind boaters that drinking and boating don't mix – and that boat operators with blood alcohol levels of .08 or higher risk facing charges for operating under the influence (OUI), as well as putting themselves, their passengers and other boaters in Delaware waters at risk.

“Just like driving an automobile, operating a boat with a blood alcohol level of 0.08 percent or higher is in violation of Delaware and federal laws,” said Sgt. Brooke Africa of Fish & Wildlife Natural Resources Police, noting that marine patrols are increased over the holiday weekend to ensure safe boating and public safety. “Boat operators found at or above the legal limit will find their voyage terminated, will be arrested, and may have their vessel impounded. Anyone charged with boating under the influence also can face fines and potential jail time.”

According to national statistics from the U.S. Coast Guard, alcohol use is a leading known contributing factor to fatal boating accidents. Nationally in 2016, 282 accidents involved alcohol use, resulting in 87 deaths and 264 injuries.

The best way to minimize the risk of an accident is to make the wiser choice – don't drink and boat, Sgt. Africa said.

Environmental stressors aboard a boat – such as constant motion, heat, sun glare, and dehydration – all contribute to the negative effects of any amount of alcohol. Because of this, having a non-drinking, designated boat operator is strongly recommended.

Other tips for recreational boaters to ensure a safe and enjoyable holiday weekend include:

- Exercise patience and courtesy at crowded boat ramps and docks.
- Observe all “**Slow No Wake**” areas.
- Maintain a lookout and keep a safe distance from other vessels.
- Avoid traveling at unsafe speeds and use extra caution in congested areas.
- Make sure children 12 and younger are wearing life jackets while underway as required by law.
- Wear your life jacket and encourage all your passengers 13 and older to wear them also.
- Check navigation lights and make sure to turn them on when operating at night.
- Carry your Boating Education Card and all required safety equipment appropriate for your size vessel.
- Canoes, kayaks, and paddle boards are considered vessels, and passengers are required to have a life jacket on board and carry a whistle or other sound-producing device. If you are out after sunset, a flashlight is also required.

For access to the online Delaware Boating Handbook and other safe boating information, click [Delaware Boating Safety](#), or contact Delaware Boating Safety & Education Coordinator Sgt. Brooke Africa at 302-739-9913 or email brooke.africa@delaware.gov.

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